



How to support Moldovan diaspora in Italy? Tate's foreign policy

Saran Vladislav¹

Activity of diplomatic missions of the Republic of Moldova is inevitable in the process of coordinating migration flows and maintaining links with Moldovan diaspora. Moldova Embassy and Consulate represent an essential bridge to homeland. In general, embassy serves Moldovan citizens legally residing in those countries, whereas Consulate in parallel meets the consular needs and can also get in touch with those who are staying illegally in that particular. Community of Moldovans in Italy is one of the few that relatively managed to consolidate in a whole, so we can talk about a Moldovan diaspora. The difficulties faced by our citizens in the peninsula lies in the lack of information about their status of immigrant, incognizance of their rights and authorities where they can address to improve their situation.

Wishes of Moldovan diaspora towards diplomatic mission

According to the Law of diplomatic service of the Republic of Moldova, Nr.761-XV of 27.12.2001, article 3,1 item d, provides that diplomatic mission has as objective „protection of rights and interests of the Republic of Moldova, its citizens (physical and corporate persons) according to international practice and within limits admitted by rules and principles of international law”. Starting from this point, the diplomatic corps must be directly interested in activities and problems of citizens established in the country of residence of the Embassy. The objective named above is mostly applied by providing services related to legalization of documents, issuance of transit visa, or travel conditions in Schengen area. RM citizens are less interested in obtaining information from the embassy on staying regime, work conditions and preparation of documents they need.

Even though by definition diplomatic missions must deal with issues of its fellow citizens, there are several problems and our citizens living abroad are more dissatisfied than satisfied with their performance. ISTAT data show that Republic of Moldova had in 2005 a community of 37.971 citizens in Italy, and in 2010 their number increased to approximately 109.000 Moldovans, which represents an increase of 187, %. According to official data of Italian Government, confirmed by current RM ambassador in Italy, Gheorghe Rusnac, on the territory of Italy in 2010 there were legally 132.000 Moldovan citizens. The real figure of all Moldovans in Italy is difficult to quantify because a good part of them are illegally established there and cannot be monitored. According to ambassador Rusnac, total number of Moldovan citizens would reach 200.000, which is the second largest country of Moldovan diaspora².

According to a study on links between Republic of Moldova and Moldovan communities abroad, conducted by Dr. R. Schwartz for the International Organization of Migration Moldova, lack of information on Moldova and Italy is the most serious problem of Moldovan immigrants. This is explained by the fact that access to information can have an important role in solving their issues. Within this study, an immigrant that lives in Bologna considers that “Moldovan government has serious issues when dealing with Moldovans outside Rome and even if it attempts to have representatives in outlying areas, the volume of services they should offer requires a number of employees to cope with the large number of solicitations on behalf of diaspora”. The same immigrant from Bologna complained that “embassy does not represent them at all.”

1. The author is the winner of IDIS contest for young professionals of writing a Policy Brief on a foreign policy issue.

2. Rusnac Gh., Issues of Moldovan citizens in Italy///Republic of Moldova: migration challenges, Chisinau 2010 , p. 118

Embassy always faces difficult problems and in the best case this is an opportunity to obtain documents, but certainly does not represent the Moldovans”³.

Serious problems that Moldova is facing are weakening the connection between Moldovan diaspora in Italy and Republic of Moldova. Schwartz also says that „even if a durable connection of migrants in Italy with Moldova has remained and will continue to exist through direct links with family and close relatives, general interest towards events in Moldova is decreasing and the opportunity to return home and invest in national economy is unlikely”. Such immigrants are disappointed with the situation in their home country and integrate with relative ease in the country of residence. Therefore, we would like to note that Moldovan immigrants prefer to accept protection of the state of residence which offers them a greater care than Moldovan authorities which have proven to be incapable of creating necessary conditions for work and living, and the diplomatic mission is not able to give them the support our fellow citizens really need. In light of this situation, returning home of Moldovans to reintegrate into society and employment is unlikely, at least in the near future.

Like other migrants’ communities, Moldovan diaspora in Italy is evolving and it’s self-organizing to overcome the problems they encounter. Thus, the most common forms of organization of Moldovans in Italy are associations that reach an approximate number of 45, and all of them are since 2010 under the umbrella of a federation. Moreover, Moldovan diaspora has its own paper in Italy: *Gazeta Basarabiei* (Bessarabia Gazette), which increases the level of cohesion of Moldovan migrants. Finally, such a large number of Moldovan migrants need an interlocutor and in this context one calls for more attention from authorities by creating a mechanism able to ensure permanent contact between the parties, but more importantly, to ensure solving the problems encountered by diaspora.

Actions of diplomatic mission in support of Moldovan immigrants and Government from Chisinau

Diplomatic mission cannot entirely resolve the difficulties of Moldovan citizens abroad without proper support of competent authorities from Moldova. Thus, a form of communication between diaspora and Government from Chisinau that is expected to be effective, are the Congresses of Moldovan diaspora. The Bureau of Interethnic Relations from the Republic of Moldova was the main organizer of four Congresses, which were held in 2004, 2006, 2008, the last being held in October 2010. Fourth edition of the Congress was honored by the presence of about 110 delegates from 31 countries, including: Italy, France, Germany, Portugal, Greece, Great Britain, Ireland, USA, Canada, CIS countries. Its purpose is to strengthen the partnership between the Government of Moldova and Moldovan migrants from abroad⁴.

It is necessary to organize these meetings, while they establish a bridge between the government and Moldovan diaspora. Normally, at these congresses, state authorities have to come up with a list of priorities and solutions that would improve the situation of our fellow citizens in countries of adoption. A sustainable state policy promoted in relation to Moldovans from abroad is necessary to strengthen the diaspora in the countries where they have immigrated. A strong diaspora, with a high level of national identification, may act as an important attorney for the country of origin in solving an important number of problems. For example, the European cause of the Republic of Moldova could be supported also by the diaspora in EU countries.

Unfortunately, Chisinau has not developed, for various reasons, a sustainable policy towards its citizens from abroad and the Bureau of Interethnic Relations does not fulfill its attributions of diaspora „coordinator”. Usually, diaspora represents an interest for authorities in the period of electoral campaigns. Here we can mention the fact that both during parliamentary elections of 19 July 2009 and those of November 2010 the state opened about 80 voting sections abroad. At the last parliamentary elections, participation of Moldovan citizens from abroad was so high that there were not enough ballots at some voting sections. In Italy participation

3. Schwartz R., Analysis of connection between Moldovan communities abroad (CMH) and Moldova// IOM for Moldova, 2007, p. 14. http://www.iom.md/materials/9_diaspora_and_ocv_final_report_rom.pdf

4. Generalization of activities of IVth Congress of Moldovan diaspora, <http://www.diaspora.md/?pag=news&opa=view&id=164&tip=congre se&start=&l=>

was very high, at the parliamentary elections in 2009 participated 17,544 (48.16% of those included in the lists)⁵, and at the parliamentary elections in November 2010 participated 64,201 (89.99 of those included in the lists). Moreover, remittances constitute almost ¼ of the GDP, which is an important support for the Republic of Moldova. In this context, one requires several conclusions. First of all one calls for greater attention on diaspora because it massively participates in Moldovan economy and in electoral and decision making processes, showing interest in influencing decisions in the country of origin. Thus, it is required to create a new division of a special Agency, either within MAEIE or in another government institution to strengthen contacts with diaspora and to streamline connection between homeland and diaspora.

Obviously, we cannot deny the importance of high-level meetings between Moldovan and Italian officials. The meeting of prime-minister Vlad Filat with his Italian counterpart Silvio Berlusconi, in Italy on 17-18 November 2010, focused on discussing economic, social and political issues of the two states. They have also discussed about Moldovan citizens working in Italy, investment opportunities offered by Moldova, steps taken by Moldova towards European integration. Meetings between Moldovan officials and RM citizens from abroad are a good exercise that needs to be continued.

Relevance of the meeting Filat-Berlusconi has stimulated continuation of Moldovan-Italian dialog and culminated in signing on 5 July 2011 of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Moldova and Government of Republic of Italy on labor migration and its Implementation Protocol, by ministers of both countries: Ms. Valentina Buliga (RM) and Mr. Maurizio Sacconi (RI). Both Ministers have mentioned that this Agreement will only have a positive impact of the two states due to the fact that it regulates from legal point of view the staying in purposes of labor of Moldovan citizens in Italy. Expectations as a result of signing this agreement are high and provisions stipulated in it are promising. The agreement promises favoring of Moldovan citizens by offering a special entry quota in Italy, implementation of common initiatives designed for Moldovan citizens, and maybe the most important, art. 12 whereby citizens of a Contracting Party shall benefit of the same rights and protection as national workers of the employing country, abiding legislation of employing country on social security. Therefore, we hope that after ratification of the Agreement, Moldovan citizens will not encounter so many deficiencies in daily life and will have better working conditions.

Conclusions

Activity of Moldovan diplomatic mission in Italy manages, with large reserves, to bring positive results based on personnel capacity working within the Embassy and Consulate and with the support of Government in Chisinau. Frustrations felt by Moldovan diaspora towards authorities that should look after them are fully grounded, because at least a part of the immigrants ascertains the importance of money transfers to homeland for the economy of the Republic of Moldova, as well as the vote of confidence offered to actual government at the last parliamentary elections. In light of the last actions undertaken both by the Embassy and Filat Government, we maintain our confidence that interest in the fate of Moldovan citizens in peninsula is not just formal or declarative and that there will follow new beneficial activities, as it is normal, for the benefit of our citizens. In this regard, signing of the Agreement on social protection between Moldova and Italy is a priority, because its implementation will produce a greater support from Moldovan immigrants for the Government in Chisinau and diplomatic mission in Italy. Equally important is creating a division or agency designed exclusively to work with Moldovan diaspora that would harmonize the interaction with diaspora and would place the connections between RM and its citizens from abroad in a well-defined and efficient institutional framework.



This publication was produced by IDIS "Viitorul" with the financial support of Soros Foundation Moldova and the National Endowment for Democracy. The opinions expressed in this publication reflect the author's/authors' position and don't necessary represent the views of the donors.

5. Boțan I./Gurin C./Prohnițchi E., Voting abroad: International Practices and Recommendations for the Republic of Moldova", ADEPT, Chisinau, June 2010